

Lehrman desires to run state like a business

By JOHN McLAUGHLIN

A year ago yesterday, Lewis Lehrman, the Rite Aid drugstore king and one of the nation's original supply-siders, wrote out his first check as a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor of New York. It was for \$1,000 and it went, appropriately enough, to Roger Ailes, his ad man.



John McLaughlin

Since then, the Lehrman campaign has multiplied that original stipend 310,000 times, spending \$3.1 million just for advertising. This is \$200,000 more than the combined outlay for TV commercials and the like of the other three contenders — Democrats Edward Koch and Mario Cuomo, and Republican Paul Curran, Lehrman's opponent in the Sept. 24 primary.

No candidate in the state's history, not even Nelson Rockefeller who is still fondly regarded as the last of the big spenders, ever put up this kind of money to win an election.

Lehrman has spent a total of \$5.7 million, while Curran has managed to raise a paltry \$340,000. As a result, Curran has almost no chance of winning. Show me a candidate who can outspend his opponent 17-to-1,

and I'll show you a 17-to-1 favorite.

The Lehrman people are signing checks and paying invoices at the rate of \$15,616.43 a day. If that continues through the general election on Nov. 2, Lehrman would spend another \$1.1 million.

But it will not continue at that level. It will increase. There will be a big burst of spending in the

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two weeks preceding the primary. If Lehrman wins that, as expected, there will be another quantum spending leap as the air waves fill up with Lew Lehrman explaining how he'll stamp out crime and cut taxes. He is likely to spend \$10 million before this is over, and at least half of that will be his own money.

What is it that possesses a man to spend \$10 million to buy a governorship? It can't be the remuneration that goes with the job. Lehrman would have to serve for a century to get his investment back in salary. It can't be the public respect that is attendant with being the big man in Albany. Gov. Hugh Carey could tell Lehrman that you don't get any.

Nor can it be the compulsion to build personal monuments the way Rockefeller did with his grandiose college campuses and the Albany Mall. The heyday of public works is over.

Finally, it can't be the desire to do good things for people. You

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can't do good things without spending money, and New York doesn't have any to spend.

It will be the duty of the next governor not to build bridges but to keep them from falling down; not to care for the poor but to get them off the dole; not to make it easier for kids to go to college but to raise their tuitions and deny them loans.

So it has to be something besides compassion or the lust for fame and power that persuades Lewis Lehrman to part with so many megabucks.

What it is, I suspect, is his entrepreneur's faith that if you apply hard-nosed business techniques to government, government will respond. Lehrman, after all, took a small family pharmacy business and expanded it to a national chain of drugstores. He itches to apply his business knowhow to state government.

Lehrman has said over and over that "the politicians" have made a mess of government and that it is time to put a businessman in the State House. Government, he suggest, is too important to be left to the politicians.

Let Lewis Lehrman be wished

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